EXHIBIT 15
DATE 2-21-13
HB 471

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Robin Vogler, I live in Bigfork, Montana. I am a Food Service Director and teacher for Somers/Lakeside MT School District #29 in Somers, Montana. Additionally, I serve as a Peer Educator for Farm to School in conjunction with the Montana School Nutrition Association and Team Nutrition. I am writing today in support of HOUSE BILL NO. 471

I began my career in 2006 with MT School District # 29. In direct response to a national beef recall, I initially sourced local beef for our District, thus beginning our Farm to School efforts. The quality of Montana beef is so superior to the commodity product we had been receiving and my School Food Program participation rate began increasing immediately. I was inspired to seek additional Montana products to add to our menus, including apples, greens, vegetables, lentils, Montana wheat, and of-course; Flathead cherries.

Flathead County has a childhood food insecurity rate of 20.9%. In Montana School District #29, the free-reduced lunch participation in the seven years that I have acted as Food Service Director has increased each year-from 31% in 2006 to the current 51%. While still lower than some Montana School Districts, I believe this number is indicative of critical community need as more families face food insecurity. We serve an average of 500 meals a day to a population of 580 students. I attribute our participation in large part to the fresh, prepared from scratch meals made with abundant Montana grown products. We have earned the distinction of The Healthy Montana Menu Challenge Award and are currently working on the Healthier US School Challenge as part of our ongoing pursuit of excellence. Our staff has definitely honed their cooking skills to create the best food we can, but high-quality Montana products are the stars of the menu. The food speaks for itself and our increased numbers are the end testimonial to our success.

As a recipient of several mini grants designed to assist local procurement, I can report the help has been an invaluable leg-up in starting a Farm to School Program. Directors often ask me how we can afford local products. I honestly don't know how we could afford to serve School lunch *without* Montana products. We have increased participation steadily during the past seven years while our population has remained largely stable. It is challenging to create healthy, delicious, eye-appealing meals for $2.25 a plate, but we are doing it-thanks in no small part to the best locally grown products available.

Please support HOUSE BILL NO. 471. With its passage, we can insure access to the greatest products for all Montana School children. The money spent will support local growers, local communities and economies while nourishing young bodies and minds. Let's do this for our communities, our children and our future. Thanks you for your consideration.

Robin Vogler

Food Service Director/teacher

Somers/Lakeside School District #29

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